

and mowen, that it lyke unto youre grete goodnesse to fulfillen in dede youre goodliche wordes; for we consideren & knoweliche that we han offended and greved my lord Melibee out of mesure; so ferforth, that we be nat of power to maken his amendes; & therfore we oblige and bynden us and oure freendes to doon al his wyl & his comandements. But peraventure he hath swich hevynesse and swich wrathe to usward bycause of oure offense, that he wole enjoyne us swich a peyne as we mowe nat bere ne susteine; and therfore, noble lady, we biseke to youre wommanly pitee, to taken swich avysement in this nede, that we, ne oure freendes, be nat desherited ne destroyed thurgh oure folye.

CERTES, quod Prudence, it is an hard thyng and right perilous, that aman putte hym al outrely in the arbitracoun and juggement, & in the myght & power of his enemy; for Salomon seith, Leeveth me, and yeveth credence to that I shal seyn; I seye, quod he, ye peple, folk, and governours of hooly chirche, to thy sone, to thy wyf, to thy freend, ne to thy broother, ne yeve thou nevere myght ne maistrie of thy body, whil thou lyvest.

NOW sithen he defendeth that man shal nat yeven to his broother, ne to his freend, the myght of his body, by strengre resoun he defendeth and forbedeth a man to yeven hymself to his enemy. And natheles I conseilte you, that ye mystruste nat my lord; for I woot wel and knowe verrailly, that he is debonaire and meeke, large, curteys, and nothyng desirous ne covetous of good ne richesse; for ther nys nothyng in this world that he desireth, save oonly worshippe & honour. Forthermoore I knowe wel, and am right seur, that he shal nothyng doon in this nede withouten my conseil. And I shal so werken in this cause that, by grace of oure Lord God, ye shul been reconciled unto us.

THANNE seyden they with o voys, Worshipful lady, we putten us and youre goodes al fully in youre wil and disposicioun; & been redy to comen, what day that it like unto youre noblesse to lymyte us or assigne us, for to maken oure obligacioun & boond as strong as it liketh unto youre goodnesse; that we mowe fulfillen the wille of yow & of my lord Melibee.

WHAN dame Prudence hadde herd the answeres of these men, she bad hem goon agayn prively; and she retourned to hir lord Melibee, & tolde hym how she foond his adversaries ful repentant, knowelechyng ful lowely hir synnes and trespas, & how they were redy to suffren al peyne, requirynge and preyynge hym of mercy and pitee.

THANNE seyde Melibee, He is wel worthy to have pardoun and foryiffnesse of his synne, that excuseth nat hym, axinge indulgence. For Senec seith, Ther is the remissoun and foryiffnesse, whereas confessioun is; for confessioun is neighebre to innocence. And he seith in another place: He that hath shame for his synne & knowletheth it, is worthy remissoun; & therfore I assente and conferme me to have pees; but it is good that we do it nat withouten the assent & wyl of oure freendes.

THANNE was Prudence right glad & joyeful, & seyde, Certes, sire, quod she, ye han wel and goodly answered; for right as by the conseil, assent & helpe of youre freendes, ye han been stired to venge yow and maken werre, right so withouten hire conseil shul ye nat accorden yow, ne have pees with youre adversaries; for the lawe seith, Thernys nothyng so good by wey of kynde as a thyng to been unbounde by hym that it was ybounde.

AND thanne dame Prudence, withouten delay or taryng, sente anon hire messages for hire kyn, and for hire olde freendes whiche that were trewe and wyse, and tolde hem by ordre, in the presence of Melibee, al this matere as it is aboven expressed & declared; and preyden hem that they wolde yeven hire ays & conseil what best were to doon in this nede. And whan Melibees freendes hadde taken hire ays and deliberacioun of the forside matere, and hadden examyned it by greet bysynesse and greet diligence, they yave ful conseil for to have pees and reste; and that Melibee sholde receyve with good herte his adversaries to foryiffnesse and mercy.

AND whan dame Prudence hadde herd the assent of hir lord Melibee, and the conseil of his freendes, accorde with hire wille and hire entencioun, she was wonderly glad in hire herte, and seyde: Ther is an old proverbe, quod she, seith: that the goodnesse that thou mayst do this day, do it, & abide nat ne delaye it nat til tomorwe. And therfore I conseilte that ye sende youre messages, swiche as been discrete and wise, unto youre adversaries; tellynge hem on youre bihalve, that if they wole trete of pees and of accord, that they shape hem, withouten delay or taryng, to comen unto us. Which thyng parfourned was in dede. And whanne these trespasours and repentyng folk of hire folies, that is to seyn, the adversaries of Melibee, hadden herd what these messagers seyden unto hem, they weren right glad & joyeful, and answereden ful mekely and benignly, yeldynge graces & thankynge to hir lord

Melibee & to al his compaignye; & shopen hem, withouten delay to go with the messagers, and obeye to the comandement of hir lord Melibee.

AND right anon they tooken hire wey to the court of Melibee, and took en with hem somme of hire trewe freendes to maken feith for hem and for to been hire borwes. And whan they were comen to the presence of Melibee, he seyde hem thise wordes: It standeth thus, quod Melibee, and sooth it is, that ye, causeless, and withouten skile and resoun, han doon and withouten wronges to me and to my grete injuries and wronges to me and to my wyf Prudence, & to my doghter also, for ye han entred into myn hous by violence, and have doon swich outrage, that alle men knowen wel that ye have disserved the deeth, and therfore wol I knowe & wite of deeth, whether ye wol putte the punyssement & the chastisyng & the vengeance of this outrage in the wyl of me and of my wyf Prudence; or ye wol nat?

THANNE the wiseste of hem thre answered for hem alle, and seyde, Sire, quod he, we knowen wel that we been unworthy to comen unto the court of so greet a lord, & so worthy as ye been; for we han so greetly mystaken us, & han offended & agilt in swich a wise agayn youre heigh lordshipe, that trewely we han disserved the deeth. But yet for the grete goodnesse and debonairetee that al the world witnesseth in youre persone, we submytten us to the excellence and benigntee of youre gracious lordshipe, and been redy to obie to alle youre comandements; bisekyng yow, that of youre merciable pitee ye wol considere oure grete repentaunce and lowe submyssioun, and graunten us foryevenesse of oure outrageous trespas and offense. For wel we knowe that youre liberal grace and mercy strechen hem further in to goodnesse, than doon oure outrageouse giltes & trespas into wikkednesse; albeit that cursedly and dampnably we han agilt agayn youre heigh lordshipe.

THANNE Melibee took hem up fro the ground ful benignly, and receyved hire obligaciouns and hire boondes by hire othes upon hire plegges & borwes, and assigned hem a certeyn day to retourne unto his court, for to accepte and receyve the sentence and juggement that Melibee wolde comande to be doon on hem by the causes aforesayd; whiche thynges ordeyned, every man retourned to his hous.

AND whan that dame Prudence saugh hir tyme, she freyned & axed hir lord Melibee, what vengeance he thoughte to taken of his adversaries.

O which Melibee answerde and seyde, Certes, quod he, I thynke and purpose me fully to desherite hem of al that evere they han, and for to putte hem in exil for evere.

CERTES, quod dame Prudence, this were a crueel sentence, and muchel agayn resoun; for ye been riche ynough, & han nonede of oother mennes good; & ye myght lightly in this wise gete yow a covetous name, which is a vicious thyng, & oghte been eschued of every good man; for after the sawe of the word of the Apostle, Coveitise is roote of alle harmes. And therfore it were bettre for yow to lese so muchel good of youre owene, than for to taken of hire good in this manere; for bettre it is to lesen with worshippe, than it is to wynne good with vileynye and shame; and everi man oghte to doon his diligence and his bisynesse to geten hym a good name. And yet shal he nat oonly bisie hym in keepynge of his good name, but he shal also enforcen hym alwey to do somthyng by which he may renouvelle his good name; for it is writen that, The olde good loos or good name of a man is soone goon and passed, whan it is nat newed ne renouvelled.

ANAS touchynge that ye seyn, ye wole exile youre adversaries, that thynketh me muchel agayn resoun and out of mesure, considered the power that they han yeven yow upon hemself. And it is writen, that he is worthy to lesen his privilege that mysuseth the myght and the power that is yeven hym. And I sette cas, ye myght enjoyne hem that peyne by right and by lawe, which I trowe ye mowe nat do. I seye, ye might nat putten it to execucioun peraventure, and thanne were it likly to retourne to the werre as it was biforn; & therfore if ye wole that men do yow obeisance, ye moste deemen moore curteisly; this is to seyn, ye moste yeven moore esy sentences & juggements. For it is writen, that he that moost curteisly comandeth, to hym men moost obeyen. And therfore I prey yow that in this necessitee & in this nede, ye caste yow to overcome youre herte. For Senec seith: that he that overcometh his herte, overcometh twies; and Tullius seith, Ther is nothyng so comendable in a greet lord as whan he is debonaire & meeke, and appeseth him lightly. And I prey yow that ye wole forbere now to do vengeance, in swich a manere, that youre goode name may be kept and conserved; and that men mowe have cause & matere to preyse yow of pitee & of mercy, & that ye have no cause to repente yow of thyng that ye doon; for Senec seith, He overcometh in an yvel manere, that repenteth hym of his victorie. Wherfore, I pray yow, lat mercy been in